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ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC BASE AND POLITICAL AND LEGAL SUPERSTRUCTURE: THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN LOGICAL REPRESENTATION AND DIALECTICAL REPRODUCTION

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1. The Question

In the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx summarizes his developments on the general form that the unity of the social relationship takes by saying:

> The general conclusion I reached, and which once obtained served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be summarized as follows: in the social production of their life, men establish certain necessary relationships independent of their will, relations of production that correspond to a specific stage of development of their material productive forces. The totality of these relations of production forms the economic structure of society, the real foundation upon which the legal and political superstructure rises, and to which correspond certain forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political, and spiritual life in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1973a: 8-9).

2. The Dominant Conceptions in Marxism

Marxist theory has turned this synthesis into a kind of text to be interpreted as a methodological principle for the development of any research on the concrete forms that social relations take in each specific situation in their unity. Like any theoretical representation, this Marxist interpretation starts from the concept that concrete forms contain no more objectivity than their very assertion of existence and that, therefore, none can contain within itself any necessity to transcend itself to become another, and, which amounts to the same thing, be the necessity of the other, nor can the other be the way the first exists. They are conceived as pure immediate assertions. Therefore, there can be no more content than form here, nor more form than content. The economic base is the economic base, the legal and political superstructure is the legal and political superstructure. The productive forces are the productive forces, the relations of production are the relations of production. They are conceived as two existences, each stated in itself, separate from the other. By their very nature as immediate assertions, they are mutually external, having no way to put themselves in motion to relate to one another.

But, next, in order to be able to represent the real relationship in thought, one must relate them to each other. And this conception is trapped by the situation posed by Engels:

> The philosophy of nature offers us a cosmography whose starting point is a "matter in an indifferent state, identical to itself," a state that can only be represented by desperately confusing matter, motion, and their relationship; a state that could not be represented without also admitting the existence of a personal, transcendent god, the only one capable of producing the transition from that state to motion. (Engels, 1967: 153).

In the theoretical representation, the role of the "personal god" that allows one to move from stagnant existence to the movement of relation is played by logic. Formal logic corresponds directly to the conception of each concrete as a simple immediate assertion. But in the realm of Marxism, there is also an appeal to materialist dialectical logic. This logic represents every real concrete as the relationship of coexistence between two assertions, each immediate in itself and opposed to the other (Joja, 1969: 111 and 154). Consequently, no matter how much this logic is invoked, the relationship established between its two opposing poles, as well as the relationship between one pair of opposites and another, is determined by the same externality inherent in the consistency of formal logic (Iñigo Carrera, 2008: 254-255).

Base and superstructure will then be related, but this cannot consist of one being the content and the other the form that this content takes in its concrete existence. Any determination of one by the other, that is, the idea that one is the necessity that is realized under the form of the other, or, which is the same, that when the first realizes its qualitative term it does so by becoming the second, must appear as an external imposition of the limit of the latter.

Three main lines of interpretation then emerge regarding the relationship between base and superstructure, which must at the same time preserve the appearance of the reciprocal exteriority of its elements.

The first conceives the mechanical generation of the superstructure by the base, as an existence external to it that, once generated, must "assist" the base as a condition for its own subsistence as such a superstructure (Stalin, 1950: 6-7).

The second of the interpretations in question conceives the superstructure as an existence external to the base, with which it maintains a relationship of functional subordination: these are two parallel existences,

but out of the multiple existences that the superstructure could have on its own independently of the base, only those that are functional to the existence of the first survive. For example, any form of legal superstructure may be possible, but through competitive selection among them, "through human rationality," the legal norms functional to capital accumulation will prevail. When asked what it means to be "functional," the ambiguity of the answer reveals the emptiness of this construct: it turns out that functional is the superstructure that the "base requires" to "help sustain" or make its existence "stable" (Cohen, 1986: 254-255). As if the base could assume a concrete form on its own, but the superstructure, empty of any content beyond itself, facilitated its existence.

The third conception of the relationship between the base and the superstructure, which must at the same time preserve the appearance of reciprocal exteriority, is the one that can be summarized as 'the relative autonomy of the superstructure.' The base determines the superstructure, but the latter has the potential to 'react' on the base, even though the base has the 'effectiveness' to 'ultimately determine' the superstructure (Althusser, 1988: 16-18).

First of all, the term "relative autonomy" is nothing more than a contradiction in terms: "autonomy," meaning that it governs itself without being bound to another; "relative," meaning that it is governed by its connection to another. That this is not dialectics but incoherence is reflected in the inability of those who support "relative autonomy" to justify their norm. Marx makes it clear that a norm cannot be explained by its deviations, or equilibrium by imbalance; on the contrary, one must start by discovering the necessity of the norm in order to explain its need to manifest itself, taking the concrete form of constant deviation from itself (Marx, 1973b: 191). What is the norm of "relative autonomy," that is, what is its quality? Althusser cannot go beyond defining it as an "index of

effectiveness," that is, as a norm whose quality can only be explained by its degree, meaning by its quantitative deviation (Althusser, 1988: 16).

Another clear example in the same sense is offered by Gramsci: he warns that one must not fall into "economism," nor into "ideologism," but he can say about the determination itself only that "it is hardly established with precision" (Gramsci, 1980: 54). How can one know that one is leaning toward one side or the other if one cannot define what it means to be at the equilibrium point, that is, at the point where falling to one side or the other has mutually canceled out, and therefore their relationship no longer explains anything?

All the complexity of the actual relationship ends up being reduced to a quantitative ambiguity: Much, little? Which is not surprising, since logic is the necessary form to ideally represent quantitative determination considered in itself (Iñigo Carrera, 2008: 289-290). It is because, in reality, the representation only corresponds to a determination of quantity that none of the proponents of "relative autonomy" and similar conceptions can state the quality of the determination, and they cannot go beyond explaining it as a matter of quantitative deviations lacking a standard.

And this exteriority, empty of any quality, leads the adherents of relative autonomy, who are naturally much more numerous than those of the two previous conceptions, to define it simply as the mark of a limit that the base imposes on the free movement of the superstructure. So much so that the claim has even been published that relative autonomy resembles that of a dog tied to a post by a chain.

3. Economic relations in their concrete necessary form of legal and political relations

The dialectical method is opposed to the representations seen: the "reproduction of the concrete through the path of thought" (Marx, 1971: 21). Therefore, this method does not start by stating the concept of

economic base and the concept of legal and political superstructure, only to then relate them externally. It begins by confronting the concrete itself, tracing it back to its simplest form, in order to ideally follow the development of its necessity from there.

The most concrete example here is the organization of the human life process, that is, of the human social metabolism process. Since this is a process whose inherently specific basis lies in labor, the starting point is in the way it is organized, that is, in the mode of production.

In the capitalist mode of production, the general organization of social labor and, consequently, of social consumption, is not carried out through direct relationships between people. On the contrary, individuals participate in this organization as free individuals, without any personal dependency. It is a way of organizing social life in which individuals are free from each other because their general social relationship is embodied in the products of social labor, as the property that these products have to relate to one another directly in exchange, thereby indirectly establishing a social relationship between their owners. That is, social labor is carried out privately and independently, and once materialized in its product, it appears as the social attribute it has of being an exchangeable object, a commodity that carries value.

The unity of the organization of the process of social metabolism is not, therefore, an attribute of individuals, but is established automatically as an attribute of the product of social labor. An attribute that confronts its own producers as the objectified capacity to activate social labor, which sets it in motion with the immediate goal not of producing use-values for human life, but of producing more capacity to activate social labor automatically, that is, as a value that valorizes itself, as capital. In the capitalist mode of production, individuals are personally free because they are subject to the dominance of the social powers of the product of social labor. Their free consciousness is the shape their alienated consciousness

takes in capital. People only count from the perspective of the organization of the social metabolism process insofar as they are personifications of commodities, and more specifically, of capital.

The simplest concrete form that the general social relation takes in the capitalist mode of production is, therefore, the indirect relation between people established through the exchange of commodities and the competition among them to realize their value in circulation. But no matter how much they carry the general social relation, commodities are inanimate objects. Therefore, their exchange and competition need to be carried out in the form of the relation established by their owners as personifications of them: the contract of sale and the practice of competition in buying and selling. That is, the indirect relation that determines the consciousness and will of free individuals as personifications of commodities necessarily takes place in the concrete form of a direct, antagonistic relation—i.e., a conscious and voluntary relation—between personifications of commodities. Thus, it is a general social relation established indirectly through the exchange of commodities, which affirms itself in its realization by negating itself as such in the concrete form of a direct relation between personifications.

We then distinguish, in the indissoluble unity of this social relationship, a content: the indirect relations between people mediated by commodities—which determine consciousness—and the necessary form of realizing it through direct relations between personifications in circulation—where these appear to exercise a conscious dominion over commodities only apparently free. We synthesize the unity of the social relationship in the capitalist mode of production by giving the name of economic relations to this social relationship insofar as it takes the form of a relationship between commodities, and legal relations to the same social relationship insofar as it takes the form of a relationship between personifications. Far from being external to one another, legal relations are

the necessary form of realizing economic relations; there is no economic relation that does not take a legal relation as the form of its realization, nor is there any legal relation that does not have an economic relation as its content. This is the simplest concrete unity of the general social relationship through which people organize their process of social metabolism under the capitalist mode of production.

The unity of the organization of the social metabolism process as a process of reproduction determines the necessity of buying and selling labor power at its value and—in what takes the capitalist mode of production to its own historical limit—the necessity of the increasing socialization of private labor governed through the production of relative surplus value. As a concrete form of this unity being realized, these necessities determine the development of the antagonistic relationship between the two poles of the labor power market in a specific concrete form. Competition within each of the poles of this exchange takes the form of its opposite, namely, the form of a relationship of solidarity between those who personify their labor power, on one side, and those who personify their capital, on the other, both with general reach. That is, the indirect relationship of competition for the individual selling and buying of labor power, which shapes the consciousness of workers and capitalists respectively, takes the form of a direct, class-conscious relationship; the working class at one pole, the capitalist class at the other. Thus, the very indirect antagonistic relationship between labor power and capital takes concrete form, no longer as a direct antagonistic relationship between the individual worker and the individual capitalist, but as a direct, antagonistic, that is, conscious and voluntary, relationship between the classes, namely, the class struggle.

The indirect relationship between people established through the exchange of commodities resulting from capital—that is, the economic relationship inherent in the capitalist mode of production—thus shows that

it necessarily takes place under a concrete form of direct relationship between personifications, that is, a legal relationship, which transcends individual and therefore merely private scope, going beyond the private legal relationship. The scope of this legal relationship has an immediately social character, involving classes and their struggle. It is a public legal relationship, or in other words, a political relationship.

The class struggle is the necessary concrete form for the unity of the organization of the process of social metabolism to be realized, whose simplest form is the indirect relation of capital accumulation, both in its immediate reproduction and in the historical necessity that it inherently carries to annihilate itself into a higher social form through its own development. In the capitalist mode of production, there is no movement of capital accumulation, and therefore no movement in the organization of the materiality of the human life process, that does not have the class struggle as the necessary concrete form for its realization. Likewise, there is no movement of the class struggle that is not the necessary concrete form of capital accumulation and, therefore, of the organization of the materiality of the human life process.

The class struggle is the bearer of the unity of the organization of the process of social metabolism, that is, of the movement of the total capital of society. But, due to its very form of openly antagonistic relation between those who embody labor power and capital, it denies itself as the bearer of that unity to assert itself as an obstacle to it. Thus, the class struggle carries within itself the necessity to take a concrete form where the manifest class antagonism assumes the form of its opposite; the form of a relationship of general solidarity where every class antagonism appears inverted as an antagonism put at the service of the better pursuit of the general interest. To do this, this concrete form of the class struggle, which must simultaneously be presented to the consciousness of those involved as the most general and original form of the general social relationship, needs to

keep its content of relationships between personifications of commodities hidden. It needs to appear as a direct relationship of solidarity between mutually free individuals. But, at the same time, as the bearer of the most general unity of the indirect social relationship between people, it needs to reproduce the very form of the commodity relationship, that is, it needs to present itself to its members' consciousness as an objective external existence alien to their persons, to whose social powers they are subjected in their condition as free individuals. This concrete form of the general social relationship is the citizenship of the state.

Above all, one can only be a citizen of the state when one is a person free from personal dependency relationships. As noted earlier, such freedom is not a natural attribute, but a historically specific social relationship characteristic of commodity producers and, therefore, a social relationship that only takes on a universal character under the capitalist mode of production. In other words, one is free from personal dependency relationships because one is a personification of commodities. The relationship of citizenship is a direct relationship between personifications of commodities. But this content appears inverted in the relationship of citizenship as an abstractly natural condition: one is a citizen by 'blood' or by 'soil' from a certain natural age. But one is not abstractly a citizen; rather, one is a citizen of the state.

The state is that social relationship, the product of the conscious and voluntary action of commodity personifications, which confronts them as an objective existence separate from them—the bureaucratic and military apparatus of the state—which, by its nature, has the social power to dominate them in their seemingly natural condition as free individuals. As the more concrete form of the general unity of the organization of the process of social metabolism under the capitalist mode of production, the state is the political representative of the total capital of society and, therefore, the exploiter of the working class within that unity. But, for the

same reason, the centralization of capital as property of the state is the most potent form of the socialization of private labor and, therefore, the most powerful form of developing the productive forces of social labor in which the capitalist mode of production carries the necessity of its own transcendence. And this transcendence is none other than a social organization where freedom ceases to consist in not being subject to personal dependence because one is subject to the alienated control over the product of one's own social labor, in order to assert itself as the absence of all personal subjugation because one has full conscious control over the organization of one's own social labor.

The specifically capitalist determination of the state's citizenship relation, and therefore of the state itself, is to be the general concrete form in which the class struggle is realized. There is no movement of the class struggle, and therefore of the organization of the materiality of the social life process through the accumulation of capital, that does not take the concrete form of the state's action. And there is no action of the state that is not the concrete form in which the class struggle is realized and, therefore, the organization of the materiality of the social life process through the accumulation of capital.[1]

It is worth concluding the development by asking ourselves about the content contained in Marxist conceptions that mutilate the unity of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production, by placing the superstructure in an external relationship with the base through inverting the dialectical method to its opposite, that is, into a logical representation (Marx, 1968: 190; Marx, 1982: 33-57; Marx, 1973c: 71-74). The key question is: if the superstructure has a movement that is not the way the

[1] "My research led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor forms of the state can be understood by themselves or by the so-called general evolution of the human spirit, but rather, they are rooted in the material conditions of life, which Hegel summarizes under the name of 'civil society,' following the precedent of the English and French of the 18th century, and that the anatomy of civil society must be sought in political economy" (Marx, 1973a: 8).

necessity of the base is realized, then where does its necessity come from? The answer that these conceptions implicitly or explicitly give is that such necessity arises from the very will of free individuals. But where does this free will really come from? As we saw earlier, personal freedom is a historical social relation. One is free, that is, not subjected to the personal domination of another in the organization of social labor, because one is subject to the domination of social powers embodied in the product of one's own labor. Free will is nothing more than the form of will alienated in the commodity and, more specifically, in capital. The conceptions in question start by turning this historically determined social relation, which is freedom, into an abstraction, reduced to having no content other than its immediate appearance. And thus abstracted, it can have no origin other than naturalization: what is a social relation specific to the capitalist mode of production is inverted into a human natural attribute. It follows the emptying of the consciousness of the working class as the subject of revolutionary overcoming of the capitalist mode of production of any specific determination according to the development of the materiality of the labor process, being represented inversely as the product of the development of a supposed natural human libertarian spirit. These are conceptions that, under the appearance of being critical of the capitalist mode of production, are themselves trapped in commodity fetishism from their very method.

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